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SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S, IIP/SEG (MICHAEL BANDLER)

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TAGS: [OIIP](#) [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: WILL POWER HIP-HOPS ACROSS LESOTHO

REF: SMITH-BANDLER E-MAILS (MARCH-JUNE 2008)

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¶1. SUMMARY: From May 6-12, American Hip Hop Artist Will Power conducted a high impact, dynamic program in the Kingdom of Lesotho on the history of hip-hop music. In his numerous events, ranging from university lectures to rural jam sessions to live mass audience performances, he projected a vitality, ease, and hip edge which helped to link the immensely popular hip-hop youth culture in Lesotho with the United States in the consciousness of many of our mission's target groups. Mr. Power's broad understanding of modern American culture and his ability to use music and performance to deliver messages on HIV/AIDS, equality, diversity, and mutual understanding helped advance U.S. Mission and USG goals in the Kingdom. High points of the program included a free concert combining Will's live performances with those of local talent, raucously enjoyable lectures and performances at local schools, and interactions with local musicians in the mountain village of Semonkong. For any post seeking to reach out to youth, artistic, and general audiences through the powerful medium of hip-hop, Will Power is an excellent ambassador of the genre who will not only charm all of post's contacts, but teach lasting lessons on the diversity, richness, and funky coolness of American culture. This was one of our most successful speaker programs in recent years. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Below is Embassy Maseru's official review of Will Power's speaker program:

¶A. NAME OF SPEAKER AND DATE OF PROGRAM

NAME: Will Power, a performer, playwright, musician, and educator credited as a pioneer in the genre of "Hip-Hop Theater"

PROGRAM: Will Power conducted a cultural program on history of hip-hop in Maseru and Semonkong, Lesotho, on May 6-12, 2007.

¶B. BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TOPICS, VENUES, AND AUDIENCES ADDRESSED

During an intense five programming days in Lesotho, Embassy Maseru's Public Affairs Section (PAS) arranged: 1) presentations for Will Power at the National University of Lesotho, Machabeng High School, the American Room at the State Library of Lesotho, the American International School of Lesotho, and the U.S. Embassy; 2) media interviews and guest DJ spots on People's Choice FM radio, Joy FM radio, Lesotho Television and various print publications; 3) a full-day workshop with young local musicians and actors; 4) a free concert for hundreds of participants combining the performances of Will Power and his workshop participants; 5) interactions with local popular music, choral, and dance groups in the rural village of Semonkong during an outreach visit; and 6) a recording session with a local hip-hop band.

The topics addressed during the program included: 1) the history

of hip-hop and the social conditions which led to its inception; 2) the relationship of hip-hop to self-empowerment and story-telling traditions; 3) new genres of expression such as "hip-hop theater"; and 4) the United States as the birthplace of this music form.

Will Power's sessions were located at:

-- Lesotho Sun Hotel Ballroom (free public performance).  
Audience: The general public, approximately 180.

-- National University of Lesotho (lecture on the history of hip-hop).  
Audience: University students, approximately 20.

-- Machabeng High School.  
Audience: High school students, approximately 200.

-- The American Room at the State Library of Lesotho.  
Audience: Local artists and hip-hop fans, library staff and patrons, approximately 40.

-- The American International School of Lesotho.  
Audience: Students, grade K-8, approximately 100.

-- Maseru Club Hall.  
Audience: Workshop participants, approximately 15.

-- Semonkong High School and Lodge.  
Audience: Local traditional performers, approximately 40.

-- People's Choice FM and Joy FM Studios.  
Audience: Radio DJs and media professionals, approximately 15 (plus thousands of radio listeners).

-- U.S. Embassy Public Diplomacy Room.  
Audience: U.S. Embassy local staff, approximately 40.

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#### 1C. AUDIENCE SIZE

According to the estimate above, this program directly reached approximately 650 individuals. However, through effective use of the mass media through traditional interviews and guests DJ slots, the audience size for this program was actually several thousand.

#### 1D. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SPEAKER IN COMMUNICATION OF INTENDED MESSAGES TO TARGET AUDIENCE

On the topic of hip-hop, we could not have hit the mark more precisely than we did with Will Power. Post would like to thank IIP for finding this excellent speaker and cultural ambassador.

As a remarkable educator as well as entertainer, Will Power was able to charm and seize the attention of his audiences from the first moments of his presentations. Using freestyle rap and urban dance moves to begin his sessions, he instantly differentiates himself from the "typical" U.S. Embassy speaker. As hip-hop is a topic which youth audiences already associate with and enjoy, he has a natural advantage in getting and maintaining their attention. While not overstating the case of hip-hop being an American art form, his personal story of growing up in Southern California and listening to music coming out of the New York scene made this point clear.

From the U.S. Ambassador and senior officials to rural traditional dance musicians, Will's charisma was infectious. Throughout his trip, he drew from recently learned lessons about Basotho culture in his lectures to localize his content. Using hip street language with many audiences, Will is an articulate and thoughtful presenter. His constant interaction with the audience, a mainstay at all of his presentations, was also highly effective. He also excelled at rural events, during which he used impromptu performances to cut through linguistic

as well as cultural barriers.

In sum, this was a great program.

#### QUALITY OF IIP SUPPORT

Embassy Maseru greatly appreciates IIP's support during the entirety of this program. The lines of communication between our post and Program Officer Michael Bandler were open, effective, and constant. As a "PD-light" post with limited resources, Embassy Maseru is delighted to have been offered this opportunity. We were in frequent communication with IIP regarding Will Power's schedule and requirements, and appreciated IIP's pre-departure coordination with Mr. Power.

#### 1F. IMMEDIATE RESULTS/IMPACT

As a program which promoted the understanding of a popular youth cultural phenomenon and an American art form, Will Power's speaker program helped Embassy Maseru fulfill its Mission Strategic Plan goal of promoting mutual understanding, and also demonstrate the ability of using music and performance to deliver broader messages on HIV/AIDS, equality, and diversity.

Through the use of radio appearances and live shows, Will Power's program had Maseru buzzing. Through interacting with local talent and incorporating them into his show, he had a direct impact on key influencers of Lesotho's youth. Through explaining the origin and evolution of hip-hop, he also explained how a music form often associated with negative phenomenon such as exploitation of women, profane language, and violence has, in fact, many positive attributes that can be used as a positive force within society.

#### 1G. PRESS PLACEMENT REPORTING

Embassy Maseru arranged media interviews and guest DJ spots on People's Choice FM radio, Joy FM radio, Lesotho Television, and various print publications. We feel that the radio interviews were particularly effective as Will Power was able to play some of his music selections and interact with the DJ's effectively. We estimate that the viewership of Lesotho Television is approximately 30,000, and the radio programs on which Will Power participated have an estimated listenership of about 10,000 each. An article on his program was also printed in Informative Newspaper, which has a circulation of about 5,000.

MURPHY